

# THE FRONTIER

A CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON THE COMMON LIFE



EDITED BY

PHILIP MAIRET AND ALEC VIDLER

JANUARY 1952

Vol. III No. 1

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THE INFLATION PROBLEM



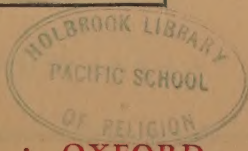
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## Frontier Luncheon

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# THE FRONTIER

A CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON THE  
COMMON LIFE

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Vol. III. No. 1.

JANUARY 1952

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## Monthly Letter

### *The Monetary Inflation*

The present monetary inflation and the likelihood of its getting worse are rousing grave apprehension in the minds of those who read the more intellectual portions of the newspapers. The rest of the population generally limit their comments to exclamations at the continual rise of prices, regarding the subject as a whole with a sort of mystified apathy, for which there is some excuse. Any serious effort to understand the present inflation soon brings one up against questions of fact and interpretation that are controversial as well as complicated. Nevertheless, a defeatist tendency to acquiesce in progressive inflation as a thing that has become inevitable is to be deprecated. It is reckless, because prolonged gradual inflation is like a chronic social ailment which beyond a point must become acute and mortal. And defeatism is inexcusable, because, without straying too far into disputable issues, the few things that every citizen ought to know about inflation are not beyond average lay comprehension, and it is not true that a well-informed public could do nothing at all to stop the rot.

### *Prices and Wages*

Whilst the new Chancellor of the Exchequer was taking urgent steps to cut down imports by 350 millions a year, additional wage demands were being considered which,

with those granted since the beginning of the past year will have brought the increase in the national wage bill up to 250 millions. The former—a necessary measure to prevent a collapse in the value of sterling abroad—reduces the amount of goods that will be on sale in Britain: the latter increases the quantity of money in pursuit of what goods there are. It is easy to say that the workers would really be better off if all their unions agreed to keep wages “frozen” at the existing level. In principle that is true, but its application to practice is not simple. A union which can get a substantial addition to wages in advance of other bodies of workers secures a temporary real gain for its members, until the rise has become general and prices have again outstripped wages. Such a scramble for wage-increases enables certain bodies of workers to profit a little at the expense of others, and of such unorganized classes as pensioners and people with fixed incomes. Each new wage award is at least a transitory gain, and the workers do not feel that their demands are at all unreasonable. Bigger pay-packets are emptied so much faster by rising prices that they feel they are only struggling to keep up their present standard, or not to fall too far below it.

### *The Lack of Knowledge*

The hard fact to face is that the income of the country as a whole has vastly declined. The productivity of its industry is indeed rising, but not fast enough to offset the lower return which it commands in goods imported. The consequent fall in individual real incomes cannot be arrested in the least by the distribution of more money-claims upon fewer goods. Yet it is unjust to blame trade union leaders for sponsoring higher demands for wages. Few indeed of their followers can understand the situation; union officials are elected and expected to raise the price of labour. For them to keep wage-demands in check, as they did until recently, is very difficult in a time of full employment. Most of them might agree, in private, that it would be



better for the community and all its workers if the latter would agree rather to have wages lowered in proportion as national income declined, so as to keep prices and the value of money level. But such acquiescence would require a state of knowledge, intelligence and social confidence, not only in the ranks of labour but throughout society, which does not exist. As things are, trade union officers who did not press for higher wage-rates would soon have to make room for others who did. And although, in physical fact, more money is worse than useless, the recurrent excitement of demanding and occasionally winning a rise serves psychologically to offset a decline in the material reward of labour. Up to a point, it is sedative, if not stimulating.

### *Inflation as a World-phenomenon*

The present inflation is by no means a peculiarly British complaint. In the French press you will constantly see articles about it, about the need for reducing imports, moderating wage increases and so forth, corresponding almost exactly to similar articles published in this country. Lately they have contained many demands for a regime of *austérité* like our own which not a few French writers admire to the point of envy, regarding it as a more efficient preventive of inflation than we could honestly say it is. There is hardly a European country which is not grappling more or less unsuccessfully with a problem of inflation, and in the U.S.A. itself, which is often supposed to be in the world-position Britain formerly occupied, the value of money has gone down as far and as fast as it has here, if not more so. Evidently we are dealing with a disease that is now epidemic in the West, and indeed throughout the world. Both this and the rearmament that intensifies it are deeply rooted in the huge material success of our technical way of life, through the emulation and envy that this arouses elsewhere. More than 50 per cent of the world's population live at an average rate of purchasing power which is less than a tenth of that enjoyed by British workers, and more like a twentieth

of the average incomes in North America. The poorer peoples are becoming more and more widely aware of this. Everywhere they are struggling, however ineptly in some cases, to shape their own economic lives on the Western pattern, and usually upon a political basis of antagonism to the West. For both East and West, whose interests are inextricably involved and complementary, this situation creates immense difficulties. When the poor countries try to copy the technocratic methods of the West faster than is compatible with their rate of saving or their technical and administrative capacity they engender inflation within their own borders. The pugnacious nationalism with which this is accompanied, however, imparts inflationary pressure to the West, not so much by loading its governments with extra political and military expenditure as by disrupting mutually profitable trade. The poor countries become less and less reliable as cheap sources of grain, meat, fats and metals, just when the peoples of the richer countries have become trained to regard security in their relatively high standards of life almost as one of the rights of man. Inflation is, after all, an emergency instrument for coping with well-nigh impossible economic situations, of which this is one.

### *Inflation as device of government*

Governments before the wars used to have little control over the quantity of money in circulation: the ordinary citizens of the Western states carried golden coins in their pockets. Now that all currencies are paper, and their issue and recall a matter of arrangement between the banking authorities and the government, the amount in circulation is determinable on national political grounds. Governments always prefer to keep the value of money stable, if not rising. But they often deem it wise to embark upon expensive policies for which the citizens would not willingly pay enough, either by taxation or by lending to the State. America's present re-armament programme, now amounting to a fifth of its total national income, is an example: it

enjoys some popular approval, but hardly enough to have been tolerated if the people had to finance more than a portion of it directly. It is paid for by a series of Government "appropriations" borrowed from the banks faster than they are repaid, the difference being in effect a pure dilution of the currency. The people pay inasmuch as this makes prices rise above their reach, and when they react by demanding and getting higher incomes the inflationary pressure is further augmented. Nearly every existing government is using similar means to carry out its designs, although their economic advisers try to keep them aware of the danger, and a respectable nineteenth-century banker would have thought the practice little better than government by forgery. The sacrifices thus enforced on the people may be necessary, or well worth while; the statesmen are doubtless convinced that they are. But to the extent that the issue of money becomes an instrument of rule in the hands of governments, inflation is in practice unavoidable.

### *Top-heavy Economy*

The need of governments for this surreptitious method is increased by two circumstances. One is the inability of the average citizen to comprehend the reasons for the sacrifices required of him: another is the fact that government by parties competing for popular suffrage obliges politicians, upon pain of losing support, to paint more flattering pictures of the future than the real prospects justify. Both conditions affect the work of labour leadership, now an indispensable function of our governmental system. We have thus a constant upward pressure, raising the price of unskilled labour. At the same time, the financing of government projects, whether they are essential, desirable or of speculative value, takes workers and facilities away from directly productive work. These tendencies proceed from the values accepted in present-day civilization, which have been profoundly altered by its successes. The merely useful

laborious functions are neglected in order to concentrate upon the newer occupations in which men have achieved the most striking advances. The most brilliant success so far scored by government patronage of productive enterprise has been in the sphere of jet-propelled airliners, where British producers are believed to be now five years in advance of any other country: and the most notorious failure has been in agricultural enterprise. Many contrasts reflect this top-heaviness in our economy. Most of the Western countries are stimulating the export of high-quality or luxury manufactures; Britain, especially in such lines as ceramics and textiles, has thus far been able to compete with deserved success. But we have ceased to be able to dig enough coal even for our own needs, not to mention the needs of other nations eager to import it. To our fine railway system we add (largely at its expense) ever costlier systems of transport by road and by air; but the housing of the people lags behind. A great deal is said and written about the demand, to which Lord Cherwell and Lord Portal have lately added their voices, for more technicians able to apply science to the higher manufactures, and for government aid in training them. The case for all these things looks unanswerable according to accepted standards of value. Nevertheless, there must be a limit to the raising of the height of a building by stones extracted from the lower stories. The Western technocracies are making almost frantic efforts to keep their world lead and ascendancy, by a heightening of the same abilities which gave them supremacy in the past, when conditions were very different. It is not difficult to see how inflation fits into this picture.

### *Psychological Analogy*

Perhaps every civilization exploits certain talents at the expense of others, upsetting the natural balance of life until it brings about its own nemesis. The difficulties which a nation, or a whole civilization, brings on itself are analogous to those in which individuals entangle themselves. Psy-



chologists now tell us that in most, if not all, cases the individual in society over-employs and over-develops one psychic function, such as intellect or sensation, to the neglect and partial atrophy of others no less necessary to psychic health. Often this one-sided development is carried to the point of disorder or breakdown, which may mean descent to a permanently lower level of activity. The one hope of recovery then lies through the very real hardship of recognizing this abuse of the "superior function", and altering the individual's previous way of life to one which will re-educate the psychic faculties he has suppressed. It is pretty obvious that our Western world, for the last two or three centuries if not longer, has been developing a "superior" function to formidable excess. And, looking at the strained relations of this civilization with its own inferior members and all the rest of the world, it is hard to resist an eerie feeling that much more progress upon the same lines would bring it to breakdown. Perhaps not. The free democracies, being the societies where pure science is most likely to continue to make real discoveries, may conceivably maintain their advantage for a long while yet. That is the slender hope. Perhaps science itself, by some deflection of its lines of research, may yet discover possibilities and inspire activities that will begin to redress the balance of our culture. But such hopes presuppose that there will be time: and that depends very much on whether we can stave off inflation.

### *Perfectionism*

One inflationary influence, which is of special importance now and in this country, is what Mr. R. A. Butler lately alluded to as "amiable prodigality". This is the more difficult to cope with because so much of it arises from simple high-mindedness or perfectionism. For instance, a large-scale improvement, of whatever kind, may be proposed as desirable—and may indeed be an excellent idea. After sufficiently ardent advocacy it is widely agreed that "we

cannot afford not to have it". Many other things also are proclaimed indispensable ; indeed, to call attention to such possibilities and press for their realization by the State has become almost identified with philanthropy. The desirability of these projects is often unquestionable ; it is the effort to attain so many at once, so completely and in so short a time, that is dangerous—and especially so when a large part of the national life is controlled by the State. For the State is always expected to profess exceptional perfectionism or—in reaction—exceptional parsimony. If some of us set out, as private operators, to build a power station of a dignity comparable to Durham Cathedral—a very fine thing to do—we should doubtless go bankrupt in the process ; but the State is not liable to bankruptcy, since it can print the means of payment. When it inflates, it is not only because it dare not present the bill in the form of taxation ; but because it is not under the judgment of the cost principle, and is therefore constantly tempted to overdo things. There is still a great deal of truth, making all allowances for changed attitudes and institutions, in the verdict pronounced by a great French economist on the 1907 crisis in the U.S.A. It had become inevitable, he said, because they had tried to do too many things at once and all too quickly.

### *The Need for Enlightenment*

All these pressures towards inflation need to be recognized, not to justify any defeatism in the battle against it, but for better understanding of the field in which it must be fought. Above all, people need to realize the full deadliness of the enemy. Few things disintegrate a civilized society so rapidly as the watering of its currency ; for all long-term contracts depend on its reliability. It is not only between to-day's buyers and sellers, but between people at one time and another, that money has to sustain confidence and mediate transactions. Decay of financial values soon infects the real values which, for a time, it appears to enhance. It

undermines cultural activities, conducted as they so largely are by voluntary enterprise, some of the best being those planned with the longest views. And the general detestability of inflation is intensified, in the case of Britain, by particular and urgent considerations. There is no country in the world with so vital an interest in preventing its internal prices from rising. And it is an error to imagine that only government can take effective action to this end. The amount of additional productive time and attention needed for a remedy would not be great, if undertaken by everyone concerned. This, and the avoidance of waste, the curtailment of expenditure, the moderation of demands and the encouragement of saving—measures appropriate to these ends present themselves in different forms to individuals in their various business and professional positions. That such measures are taken as little as they are is partly due to a moral discouragement. Even those who understand the situation feel that too few others can see the necessity, still less act upon it, to make one's own effort worth while. It is here that study groups and adult classes, of which so many now apply themselves to social studies, could do something to raise the level of public knowledge. What everyone ought to realize about our national money problem is neither so difficult nor dry as most people think : and there are few technical subjects of which an elementary but correct knowledge, widely disseminated, would have a more salutary effect.

## INTERIM

### Primate at Frontier Luncheon

The Primate of Sweden, Archbishop Yngve Brilioth, will be the speaker at the next Frontier Luncheon on Monday, 4th February. His subject will be "Church and State in Sweden". There have recently been important modifications of the traditional establishment of the Church in Sweden, which not only illustrate changes that are taking place in all European societies but may also be of special interest in England where the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Church and State is shortly to be published. Archbishop Brilioth is one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches. He knows England well and is a distinguished church historian.

The Luncheon will be held at the Queen Mary Hall, Great Russell Street, W.C. 1, at 12.45 p.m. The Chairman will be Dr. Eric Fletcher, M.P. for East Islington, who is a member of the Archbishops' Commission. Tickets (price 3s. 6d.) should be obtained as soon as possible from the Christian Frontier, 8 The Cloisters, Windsor Castle.

### The Compleat Usher

The Church Ushers' Association of New York have just issued a 44-page booklet on the *Principles of Church Ushering*, which we suppose would be, in our vulgar tongue, "sidesmanship". We have perused this solemn work with an awe not unmixed with envy, though relieved by occasional gusts of levity. Clearly, when it comes to showing people into their pews, Britain is still in the horse-and-buggy age. The American C.U.A. has given expert study to this subject since 1914; here is the ripe fruit of thirty-seven years of research and experience. On one point only does practice in this country seem to conform—and that very indifferently—to the principles of what the ushers modestly describe as "an art,"—that is, on what comes under the heading of "Personal Appearance". Our sidesmen's clothes are perhaps "neat" if not always "dignified". But this is barely a qualification, for

" . . . their attire should have some element of distinctiveness . . . a flower in the buttonhole, or other decoration, is useful. A carnation in the buttonhole is a very common means of identifying an usher. . . . At Easter some churches use gardenias. If desired, different coloured carnations can be used to designate ushers who are captains."



Cutaway coats, we learn, are almost but not quite *de rigueur*. Seldom will an usher otherwise qualified be turned away for lack of a cutaway. Nor, we are relieved to find, are black shoes absolutely obligatory, any "conservative type of shoe" will do provided all ushers wear the same colour. More inflexible are the rules for "deportment"; all movements must be dignified and "rather slow".

\* \* \* \*

But it is when the strategy and tactics of Ushering are elaborated for the next thirty-odd pages that we see what it really is—not only a fine art but an applied science, of which we have been living in benighted ignorance. Which of us could pass the simplest examination in "Triangle Movement" or "Front Door Defence", or "Nave and Balcony Door Control", or any other of the tactics and operations here brilliantly elucidated? Only in the sections about taking up the offertory did we clearly recognize some customary mishaps, and tactics for averting or repairing them, which might, we think, have been described with less prolixity. Almost terse, on the other hand, is the advice offered for one of the most vexing of an usher's human problems. "When a stranger steps into a pew reserved for some well-known member of the church" the usher is advised only to "whisper in the stranger's ear" the not entirely ingenuous suggestion that there is a more desirable seat further forward, which "may relieve the situation". Apparently that is all that even the A.U.C. can do—for the rule 5 on p. 30 ("As a last resort use ropes instead of ushers wherever possible") can hardly be applicable in such a case!

\* \* \* \*

Joking apart, we do not wonder that New York ushers are best taken young (18-21) and trained in a subordinate position (possibly a remote section of Balcony Control?) for two years before promotion to aisle responsibility. This irreproachable document gives a foreigner some insight into the organizational complexities of the bigger American churches. It suggests, too, that some church life elsewhere would be the better for such an emulous movement among the laity and such a genius for taking pains.

### **Eliot on European Unity**

Last month's editorial Letter and leading article about European relations, a topic of special interest to not a few of our readers, have brought us some interesting comment and conversation. Among other things, they brought to our notice the wisest words we have

read on the present phase of European relations. We refer to the message sent by Mr. T. S. Eliot to the fifth annual conference of the *Union of Christian Democrats of Europe*, held at Bad Ems last September. After observing that he did not want to add to what he had said in his broadcast talks to Germany on the general question of *The Unity of European Culture*, Mr. Eliot offered the following observations "as testimony of goodwill":

"On the one hand, I distinguish sharply between the field of action with which, as I understand the terms of reference, we are concerned, and that of political action. The primary concern of political leaders must be the immediate future. They must defer to popular feeling, yield to circumstance and take advantage of expedients. Their decisions must often be taken in the light of considerations of which most of us remain in ignorance. They take the form of pacts and plans which can be judged only by experts and by results. Politicians must appeal to obvious and pressing interests and often to the desire to avoid misfortune rather than to enthusiasm for a more distant goal.

"Those who concern themselves with the cultural unity of Europe do not aim at the return to some earlier phase of society before the appearance of nations—or to restore the Holy Roman Empire. Nor do they wish to fabricate a new unity by a complete break with the past and the present. They wish rather to bring to light, to make patent to the eyes of more and more people, what we inherit and hold in common, the culture which we still share.

"It is necessary to distinguish our task clearly from that of the politicians and the heads and representatives of governments. Otherwise we risk the loss of our own ideals. Ours is a long-term struggle towards a distant goal which cannot be, and should not be, too clearly visualized.

"Nevertheless, our work is concerned, so to speak, with the cultivation of the soil out of which the political ideas of the future must grow. How to conserve and nourish the spiritual life of Europe, how to cultivate in each region and amongst those of each race and language, the sense of a *vocation* in relation to each other. So that the glory of each people should be measured, not in material power and wealth, but by its contribution to the spiritual well-being of all the others. We do not aim merely to persuade people to accept a policy, or to pay lip-service to some magniloquent verbal creed, but to awaken their consciousness and their conscience."

### The European Movement

A letter commenting upon our last Monthly Letter on European Unity has come to us from the Rev. C. O. Rhodes, editor of the *Church of England Newspaper*. He quotes a remark of Lionel Curtis "that there are only two newspapers, religious or secular, in the whole country which supported Churchill's initiative (on European union) flat out from the very beginning", and that the *Church of England Newspaper* is one of them. There has, in fact, been pretty steady pressure on the right side from *The Observer*, *The Economist*, and the *National News-Letter*; and the crisis now confronting the statesmen at Strasbourg is awaking some unexpected reserves of European patriotism in Britain. One new development is the launching of a "European Movement Youth Campaign" to link British youth movements of various kinds with those of the Continent. This has just established its headquarters at St. Anne's House, Dean Street, W. 1.

### Industrial Conversations

*The Frontier's* special number on Industry brought us a valuable report from a Manchester reader, the Rev. L. G. Tyler, who had just succeeded in organizing a remarkably successful conference in which ten of the biggest firms of the neighbourhood and several Union leaders co-operated. The firms paid the wages of the sixty-four men who attended upon three afternoons in succession. There were three special speakers, but as our correspondent observes:—

"The fascinating feature was the zest of the five discussion groups into which we divided after each lecture. At first we had wondered if the men would talk. There was great frankness and concern about all the big problems of Industrial Relations and human issues. We could easily have allowed a much larger space of time.

"At the moment we are making plans for continuation of the work begun. The confidence which was inspired amongst all sections and the spontaneous atmosphere of the questions and discussions was an indication of the value of the experiment.

"We are investigating the possibility of a similar venture for people engaged in commerce. We have found some exceedingly useful contacts in the big shops and warehouses in the city.

"I may not need to say that all this work is quite outside the ordinary strategy of the local Churches and is breaking quite new ground.

“One other comment about the experiment is the value of this taking place at a parish level. So many conferences on Industry are arranged on a ‘high level’ both of industrialists and ecclesiastics. There seems to be no reason why similar ventures could not be carried out all over the country if the clergy were given a bit of preliminary training. It is essentially frontier work and therefore technique and purpose need to be fairly clearly thought out beforehand.”

We could not agree more with Mr. Tyler’s recommendations. The success of similar ventures of which we have heard, at Leicester and Huddersfield, shows that there is no more fertile field for frontier enterprise.

### Another Dons’ Conference

A conference of university teachers, under the auspices of the Frontier Council and the Student Christian Movement, will be held at Swanwick from March 27th to 31st, 1952. The general subject will be “The Vocation of the University Teacher”. Principal John Baillie will be chairman of the conference, and the speakers will include Sir Walter Moberly, the Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, Dr. Marjorie Reeves, Prof. John Marsh, and Prof. Donald MacKinnon. This conference is open to dons from all the British universities. Further information can be had from the Rev. Donald Mathers, Annandale, North End Road, London, N.W. 11.

### Binding Volumes of THE FRONTIER for 1951

Readers who wish to have their copies of *The Frontier*, Vol. II, bound together should send them to the publishers, Basil Blackwell and Mott Ltd., marked FRONTIER: BINDING. The charge for binding, inclusive of the Index, binding case and return postage, is 9s. 6d. Readers who prefer to make their own arrangements for binding can obtain the case and Index from Blackwell’s by sending the order and a P.O. for 3s. 6d.

The Index of Vol. II will be sent to any subscriber who sends his or her request upon a postcard.



## THE SCHOOL, SOCIETY AND THE DELINQUENT

The Tenth *Clarke Hall Lecture*, which was delivered by *Robert Birley, C.M.G., LL.D.*, is here reprinted, slightly abridged, by the kind permission of The Clarke Hall Fellowship.

I CAN well remember a certain lesson in history I once had as a boy at school. The master, being lured aside by a red herring as all the best teachers allow themselves to be at times, told us of the extraordinary changes which had taken place in social conditions in East London, which he knew well, during the last thirty years, and said, "A good test in these matters is how frightened you were then compared with how frightened you are now, to walk down certain streets after dark". I think this particular lesson first taught me that there is a great deal which is very important in history, but does not appear in the text books. I am sure that if this master were alive and teaching now, he would not have to unsay what he said then. It would do us all good, at times when we may be in danger of becoming alarmed about juvenile delinquency, to re-read *Oliver Twist*. Certainly we ought not to be complacent. The problem of juvenile delinquency is a serious one: more serious, I believe, as a long-term problem than is sometimes realized. But I feel that at the moment a good many people are not facing it very realistically.

Unless one is very optimistic indeed, one must presumably believe that in any society there will always be juvenile delinquents. There will always be a need for people with skill, patience, and imagination to deal with them. There will always be debate on the part that punishment or reformation should play in their treatment. What I wish to consider first is whether there are trends in our own society to-day which are already making or are likely in the future to make the problem of juvenile delinquency more difficult. I should like to draw on my experience in Germany and I appreciate that in doing so I am making a very large assumption.

This assumption is that what has happened in Germany is relevant to circumstances in this country. I became fully convinced when I was there that the social ills of that country were essentially the same as those from which our own country, along with the rest of Europe, suffers. This may appear a startling statement. It is in fact likely to be even more startling to myself, who am still bewildered by the contrast between the land in which I have been living and that in which I live now. Certainly a study of German history helps to show us why the more dreadful phenomena of National Socialism were more likely to appear there than in most other countries. I am not suggesting that there is really any chance of our seeing such things here. But I do not think that Germany was so different from the rest of Europe that it was affected by quite different difficulties. I regard Germany rather as a country with a social morality a great deal weaker than in any other, and therefore one far less able to stand up to the strains to which modern civilization subjects a society. If so, what happened in Germany is relevant to our own problems. Just because they were allowed to develop in such a terrible manner, we can see more easily there what these strains are and what their effects may be.

The strains to which our society to-day is subjected arise from the great changes in the way of living of the great majority of people. I suppose it is true to say that society has never before altered so completely in any one period of history of comparable length. A moving instead of a static society, constant changes in the pattern of a man's working life as industrial technique develops, and even more important, perhaps, the disappearance of the traditional hierarchic order of society—the old belief that these necessarily spelt Progress has now worn very thin. Even if we should not go so far as Cobbett in regarding them as “the destroyers of industry, of morals, and, of course, of happiness”; even if we believe that, if we can persevere and not lose heart, they will lead to a happier society in the future, we must

recognize that these changes were bound to make the art of living more difficult for most people until a new pattern of society is formed. I am concerned with one change in particular, the change in the nature and status of the family, for obviously the family is going to be the dominant influence in forming the character of the children.

There are, I believe, two main factors to be considered. Certain others seem very important and would obviously need thorough consideration in any full study of the question, but I do not think that we shall find in them the ultimate causes of the change in position of the family which I am considering. For instance, everyone is aware of the problems created by the present shortage of houses. But I doubt whether the overcrowding created by this is really any worse now than it was in big towns fifty years ago or in the country, where most people then lived, a hundred years before that. Again, easier divorce means that many husbands and wives now separate and break up the family which would otherwise have been maintained as a unit. But easier divorce has come not only owing to the weakening of the force of religious sanctions, but also because the need to maintain the family has seemed to society less urgent than before.

I think we have to look further before we can discover the causes of this change in the position of the family. It is, of course, important not to exaggerate about what is happening. If the family is not doing all it used to do, this does not mean that it is not still far and away the most important unit in society and the most influential in forming the character of the nation. I feel, however, that we must recognize the fact that the family is not as important as it used to be, and I am not sure that that is not the most far-reaching change which has taken place in modern society. In an agricultural society and in an industrial society of the kind that existed before the Industrial Revolution and still exists in some parts of the world, the family is an essential part of the economic system. This is generally understood of agricultural

society ; it is less generally appreciated how large a part the family used to play in the organization of industry. To take a single example, we happen to know a great deal about the organization of the printing industry in its early days. It is extraordinary to see how one can draw up family trees, as of baronial families in the Middle Ages, which show how closely the economic unit in the industry was identified with the unit of the family. When anything at all similar to this exists now, as for example in the London Docks, it is generally regarded as an anachronism. The family as an economic unit has largely disappeared.

This is not the whole story. The family was largely kept together by its responsibilities. This may appear paradoxical, but it seems to me an inescapable fact. Nor is it so very surprising. An article in *The Frontier*<sup>1</sup> seems to me to put the position well :—

“ Students of society appreciate the benefits the welfare state provides, its control of housing and sanitation, its provision of milk, medical aid, ante-natal care and so forth ; but the fact that the state takes so large a part of the family’s income and spends it for the family’s good means that the family is not in a position to deal spontaneously with its environment as a living organism should be. Previously it had an environment it was often simply unable to cope with ; now it has one that is largely managed for it. The risks of life, previously excessive, are much reduced, but so is the family’s sphere of effective choice, of social initiative. The consequences, upon a biological view of the case, would be a weakening of the cohesion of the family, with a decline in the sense of its importance.”

Perhaps this analysis lays rather too much stress on the part played in this process by the Welfare State, which is after all quite a recent development. We should not forget certain other agencies which have played their part. The cinema and the “ stop me and buy one ” ice-cream vendor (the latter is a social phenomenon whose importance is not

<sup>1</sup> *The Frontier*, May 1950, Monthly Letter on *Crime and Punishment : The Family in Industrial Society*.

properly recognized) are not the agents of the Welfare State, but they are just about as important in their effect on the family as "a living organism dealing spontaneously with its environment". If I had to make a social survey in London or some large city, I think I should take as my subject the change in the normal habits of family meals. I believe that this would show that the common meal, however inadequate, plays a much smaller part in the normal rhythm of family life than it used to do. The "stop me and buy one" man is always coming and going, but—and I say this quite seriously—there is nothing sacramental in the consumption of his wares, as there is in the family meal.

The second underlying cause of the weakening of the family unit seems to me to be the decline of parental authority. This, of course, is not merely a matter of punishing children when they misbehave. It is rather a question of imposing on the children a certain disciplined rhythm of existence. This is the real burden of parenthood, or in most cases more accurately motherhood, and it was very well expressed in a letter from Dorothy Wordsworth to Lady Beaumont:

"No one who has not been an Inmate with Children in a Cottage can have a notion of the quietness that takes possession of it when they are gone to sleep. The hour before it is generally a noisy one, often given up to boisterous efforts to amuse them, and the noise is heard in every corner of the house—then comes the washing and undressing, a work of misery, and in ten minutes after, all is stillness and perfect rest."

Up to a point the family in a society with a well-defined rhythm, as an agricultural society has, was almost bound to produce its own. This is largely absent in an urban, industrial society, especially when the mother is out working herself. The temptation to avoid that "work of misery", as Dorothy Wordsworth realistically styled it, is very strong, and many families have quite succumbed to it.

It is often said that this is due to a failure of confidence, a doubt whether the parent has the right to enforce his or her



will on the child. I think there certainly is such a lack of confidence to-day and that it has been fostered by superficial psychological theories. But that does not seem to me the main reason. I have often noticed that parents with ill-disciplined families, in the sense I have in mind, are perfectly ready to assert their wills capriciously when convenient and then seem little influenced by any doubts whether they ought to be doing any such thing. The reason seems to me much more often to be a lack of energy, or, more accurately, a disinclination to devote energy to this end because it does not seem to be necessary.

It is these two factors which I feel are most important in the decline of the influence of the family on the child to-day. For a child needs security. It is not only that without the commonplace discipline of a normal family life he will not learn the habit of subordinating his own desires and inclinations and so will grow up to feel that he has a right to get what he wants, whatever the interests of society as a whole may be. What is even more serious is that he will not have become used to the pattern of order in a family which is the natural microcosm of the pattern of order in society. And more serious still he will have been denied that sense of security which is the essential environment for healthy, vigorous and independent development.

We were, fair queen,

said Polixenes to Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* of his boyhood friend, Leontes,

We were, fair queen,

Two lads that thought there was no more behind

But such a day, to-morrow as to-day,

And to be a boy eternal.

That is not only the most beautiful, but also the healthiest description of childhood I have ever read. But such a state is not reached by merely allowing children to run wild and do just as they like. It is gained by allowing them to run wild within a framework of ordered life, which gives them

security, shields them from problems of existence with which they are as yet too young to cope, and allows them, as mere licence does not, really to express themselves and discover their own strengths and weaknesses.

I should like now to consider one phenomenon of the life of children in London to-day which is I think of great significance. I said before that I considered the appearance in London of juvenile gangs to be something more serious than the isolated crimes of violence which have received more attention, though no one would want to minimise the seriousness of these. I speak of them with great diffidence before an audience most of whom will have had far more experience of this problem than I have had. I believe that the gang is really a dangerous phenomenon, because it is something more than an aftermath of war or the result of seeing too many bad films. It has been called into being as a result of the children's real need. It is, in a sense, the child's answer to the failure of the family. For in the gang he finds what he really wants, and is not finding in his home, the sense of belonging to a group, the experience of discipline, and even, in an extraordinary way, a sense of security.

May I illustrate this from an account of what happened recently in a club in the East End of London? One section of this club consists of children between the ages of eight and eleven years. A gang formed itself among some of these children and their particular object of attack was a girl member of the club, who had for a short time been one of them but had left. She came from what some people might call an old-fashioned home and she was better dressed and, to put it crudely, cleaner than the rest. She was, no doubt, something of a prig. The gang called on the help of elder brothers to assist them in the persecution of the girl, until the mother of the girl was afraid to let her go out alone at night. So, far the story is quite commonplace, but the *dénouement* seems to me more remarkable. A few nights ago the lady in charge of this section of the club suggested to the children that they should get up some extempore plays

at a few minutes' notice. The members of the gang produced their own play and I think I might describe it in the words of the social worker, written down immediately afterwards. You will notice that her account begins with isolated key-sentences in the dialogue, which, I think, explain themselves, and then goes on with a narrative description of the end of the play. I may add, to avoid misunderstanding, that the part of the "good girl" was taken by one of the gang, and may I mention again that none of these children was over eleven years old.

" 'We're a gang of street ruffians—we're out to do in people—we'll force that posh girl to join us and make her do something bad so she *has* to stay—she washes in warm water—we wash in puddles—we drink blood—here she comes, let's set on her. . . . You've got to do what I say, everyone has got to do what I say. . . . I'm the leader of the gang. . . . Now you're one of us. . . . See that old woman selling flowers . . . go up when no one is looking and knock her down . . . that's good, now you've got to stay with us. . . . ' In turn they get the girl to murder another woman and then her mother. Every time she does this, she realizes what she had done and is appalled. When she realizes she has killed her mother she stabs herself. The ghost of the mother, in vengeance, then kills all the gang."

Apart from the interest of this for the student of primitive drama—and I do not think I shall ever read an early Elizabethan tragedy again without recalling it—it seems to me to tell one an extraordinary amount about what is in the minds, or perhaps one should say the collective unconscious, of these gangs. It is not the blood-thirstiness that matters. I have no doubt that the games that Polixenes and Leontes played in their idyllic boyhood would often have horrified their elders. In fact, the one perfectly healthy and innocent remark in the play seems to me to be, "We drink blood". Countless Red Indians and pirates have said that before. And other and more famous plays have ended with the stage covered with corpses. We may note rather the sense of solidarity in the gang—the good girl is different from the

rest, she is "posh"—and the iron discipline exacted by the leader, such as everyone knows is an actual fact and is one of the attractions of the gangs.

I am afraid that at this point I must invite you to enter that sinister territory, which I said I should not be able to keep out of. For, when I heard this account, I knew it to be perfectly familiar. It was exactly what one knew in Germany as National Socialism. That was an answer, the Devil's answer, to a real social problem. I shall not attempt to suggest how far it was due to history or to innate national characteristics or to the economic circumstances of the time, but Germans before 1933 felt helpless in their inability to combine, in their individual isolation and their sense of insecurity. Then came the god-given leader who offered them comradeship in a new form of society, the discipline they longed for, a sense of achievement and of excitement, and union in detestation of those who were different and had been more successful.

I must not labour the point. I feel that you will either accept my comparison with all its implications or not, and that argument will do little to influence your decision. To me this seems a perfectly familiar social phenomenon. But, if I am right, I think we ought to face the implications. Those children will grow up into a world which will not do much to help them. A National Health Service, free education for their children, all that the State now provides, and I think rightly provides, will not give them the security they missed before, nor will they, in themselves, give them the security of mind which only a settled state of society provides. Here, unless something can be done now to give them what they need, is growing up the material for developments in our national life which we have hardly thought possible. During the great slump of twenty years ago I spent much of my time in an industrial town in the south of England. Nothing amazed me more than the astonishing social discipline of the unemployed. I remember once the manager of a Labour Office, or an Employment Exchange

as it was then called, telling me how he used to receive the money for the payment of benefit in bundles of newly printed notes which constantly stuck together, how the men were often by mistake paid ten shillings or a pound more than they were due to have, and, he said, never once did he know a man keep the money. They always brought it back and said that a mistake must have been made. When I tell that story to-day, I always get the same answer: "That would be impossible now". What a tradition of disciplined life lay behind this country in those days. No one can be sure that if we ever went through a similar experience again we should find it there once more to help us.

I think it must be insisted that this is an immediate problem. The only final solution will be the restoration of an orderly pattern of family life, but that will take long to find. Is there any substitute? I am the last person to decry the work of the clubs. We have only to imagine what London would be like without them. But the clubs cannot hope to affect all the children, and so cannot become an integral part of the life of the whole community. Inevitably they are least likely to have the chance to influence those children who need them most. I hope it is appreciated that the most remarkable point of the story I told of the children's play is that those children were still members of a club at all. That is a very great tribute to the club. There is hope for those children.

I certainly do not feel that the solution is some kind of compulsory State Youth Movement. This I feel to be something quite unnatural. The one solution is to be found in the school, and that because the school has now become something absolutely inevitable and natural to the child. In eighty years it has become part of the unconscious pattern of our national life. I am not suggesting that the school can be a substitute for the family. In fact, we ought to recognize the danger that it might become so. But we should grasp the nettle and consider the point where the school seems to impinge most obviously on the sphere of



the family and see whether this danger really exists. And this may lead us to see what it is that the school can do. I refer to the institution of school meals. I am not for the moment concerned with the advantages to the children's health of the school meal, though I am sure these are considerable, but with the argument that the school meal frees the parent from a natural responsibility and so weakens the ties which bind a family together, in fact, to use the words quoted earlier in this lecture, that it reduces the social initiative of the family. Those who say this often have rather a hazy idea of what the midday meal in many families in large towns really is. I must admit that I find it illogical when this view is put forward, as it so often is, by people who are perfectly happy to send their own children away to boarding-schools for eight months of the year. They know quite well that their doing this has not weakened the ties of their own families. Many services now rendered to individuals, whether by the Welfare State or by other agencies, reduce the demands made on the family. But there is an essential difference in the effect on the child when these services are rendered by a living organism to which the child belongs. I do not see how one can fail to be impressed by the social possibilities of the school meal. Any one who knows anything about children knows quite well that meals play an extremely important part in marking out for them an orderly rhythm of life and that they can be used perfectly naturally as a means of educating children in the arts of social order and discipline. I do not hesitate to say myself that I look on this new development in the life of the English school as something to be proud of. I think it is quite possible that it may do more than any one element in the normal education provided for our children to restore that experience of rhythm, order, and security which so many of them lack. The school meal is only one example, of course, of the way in which the British tradition of regarding the school as a community, a place where a child learns to be a member of society, is being strengthened. I

do not think that it is generally realized how important the school has become as a natural organism in our society.

If I may refer again to my experiences in Germany, I first came to realize there how important the school now is. I regard our institution of school meals in the British Zone as the most constructive and valuable of our achievements there. I could see how it gave both teachers and children a new idea of what a school might be. In a country where, in the large towns, the structure of society seemed to be almost completely shattered, the school stood out as a rock of stability and security. For many children it was the only barrier defending them from a life of utter barbarism. I admired more than I can say the patience and unselfishness of the German teachers who, in a world of the black market, kept alive normal moral standards. To those children, coming as most of them did from appalling overcrowding, often in cellars or squalid huts, the school offered the experience of a natural, orderly existence ; there they could feel that people cared for them and were working for them. That was an extreme example, of course, but it is something like that that the school has become in a world where, as I have said, men, through no fault of their own, are living without much of the stable framework provided by a traditional order of society.

I feel that the school has a right to demand two things especially from society and society two things from it. If I am right in thinking that the problem of juvenile delinquency, which now gives us so much concern, must be regarded as a deep-lying social problem, then, I feel, that the nature of the school is something which closely concerns all of us and not only those directly interested in education, as parents of children or teachers or administrators.

The first of the demands that the school now makes on society is one very familiar to you, which you may be almost weary of hearing. It is the demand for smaller classes. If you regard a school simply as a place where children should be instructed, then the demand for small classes is not nearly

so urgent. It is perfectly possible to work out a kind of instructional drill which would enable teaching by itself to be quite reasonably efficient in the large classes we so often have to-day. I came to this conclusion in Germany where I found that many of the older generation genuinely could not see why there was this demand. They had been educated when they were at the primary school very efficiently indeed, according to a technique which was perfectly well fitted to classes of fifty or sixty. But if you believe that a school should be a community, where a child learns the art of living, where he experiences discipline arising out of a sensible and affectionate care of him—and is not that the secret of the order which we hope to see in a family or a school?—then it becomes absolutely essential to have classes small enough for the teacher to be able to treat each child as an individual.

The second demand which, I feel, the school should make of society is that the school itself should be small enough. This is a more controversial point. But I do not see how a school can become a living organism which calls forth the loyalty and the sense of responsibility of the children if it is too large. I must own that I consider the plan for creating large comprehensive schools of as many as two thousand children a complete betrayal of all that the schools of this country have come to stand for. I do not believe that these schools will even do what they set out to do, that is, solve the problem of the different esteem in which different kinds of secondary schools are held. But I must be careful not to mount a hobby-horse. All I need say here is that to send children to a school of such a size will be to place them in an institution which will only be able to keep going at all if it is regarded as a complicated administrative machine. I do not see how such a school will be able to evolve its own peculiar characteristics and atmosphere, created by the personal efforts of those who work in it.

I said that in turn society had two demands to make of the school. The first is that it should do all it can to reduce the

tension that may be set up in the mind of the child between school and family. Only if this is done can we hope that the order which the school now gives the child will be reproduced in the next generation in the family, and the school will fail if it cannot secure this. For this reason I believe that the development of parent-teacher associations or any other methods of building up close relations between the two is so necessary. Most people have had experience of some primary school which by such contact with the parents is making itself the real centre of healthy and lively culture in a neighbourhood. I have made no mention of nursery schools; what I have said in general about schools obviously applies especially to them. But I must add that it seems to me particularly important that in the nursery school the relations between the teachers and the mothers of the children should be really intimate.

The second demand of society is more controversial. It may be expressed simply as the demand that the school really should give the children the experience of an orderly, stable life. I have no time to deal with all the educational issues involved in this. But there does seem to me a danger that the schools may tend to go the way the family too often has. It was not only natural, it was absolutely necessary, that teachers should react against the methods on which until fairly recently education was usually based. But do not let us forget that "work of misery" of which Dorothy Wordsworth wrote. You cannot provide a stable life for children simply by putting them in a room together. It is something that has to be created, and this needs not only sympathy and a readiness to interest them, essential as those qualities are, but also firmness and perseverance. If we take seriously this essential function of the school in modern society, I think we shall have to examine very carefully several recognized techniques of modern education. It is, I know, unfair to put too much weight on a phrase, but is not "free activity," the term used for one of these techniques, exactly what a child nowadays too often has too much of in any case?

The teacher's work is always difficult because it is an art and not a science. It must aim to produce a harmony. It is, I believe, a heresy to say that the main task of education is to enable a child to express his or her own personality. That is not enough. A little examination shows that it is an ideal which must produce a selfish spirit. But how to develop the personal gifts of a child and also to teach him to put them intelligently at the service of his fellows—well, there we touch on mysteries which a good teacher understands though he cannot explain, just as an artist may be baffled if he is requested to explain the processes of his art.

I have spoken rather grimly of certain tendencies in our life to-day, in particularly of the decay of that traditional training in order which the family provides, and I have suggested that it is through a study of such phenomena that we may find the solution to some of the problems of the young offender which cause us such concern to-day. I do not want to make too much of them or, above all, give the impression that I think that wholesome family life is a thing of the past in this country. We in England have little idea of what the real disruption of society means. I think that, as citizens of a great country with a responsible position in the world, we ought to know more than we do of this. Every Englishman who feels this responsibility should read such a book as Dorothy McCardle's most moving and terrifying picture of modern Europe, *Children in Europe*.

May I tell you of an experience I had two years ago which has been in my mind all the time as I pondered over the subject of this lecture? A young man in the Education Branch of the Control Commission who was working on my personal staff was once walking through a badly bombed industrial district in Hamburg. On his way he passed a hut where, he was told, he would find a number of boys who had been found wandering, homeless and without relatives in the city. He went in and talked to one of these, a boy of fourteen, who came from Berlin where our Education Branch Headquarters were situated, and he persuaded



him to return with him to his home. There in Berlin I saw the boy myself and heard his story. He had been working on the railways and had received the offer of a place in an apprenticeship school for boys in the railway workshops at Magdeburg in the Russian Zone. He lived there with twenty other boys in a large hut. One night one of the boys suggested that perhaps the Russians had enticed them there to take them off to Russia in forced labour. In one minute, he told me, they were all out of the window and scattered. He and another boy made their way across country and over the zonal frontier to Hamburg. He never saw any of the others again.

We ought to try to understand what a weight of experience in fear, loneliness, and uncertainty lay behind that one appalling moment of panic.

How wonderfully stable and strong our society seems to be in contrast! And yet the underlying tensions of our society are the same as those which, under the force of tragic circumstances, have created the misery in which so many children live on the continent of Europe. Such phenomena as the increase in juvenile delinquency and the gangs of young ruffians, of which I have spoken, are signs that these tensions exist here also. I do not believe for one moment that they can be resolved by any such expedients as a restoration of corporal punishment as a penalty of the courts. We have to try to find much deeper remedies. It is because I believe that we have evolved in this country an educational tradition and an idea of the school which will help us to do this that I ask you to consider the school as an essential element, and the most hopeful one, in the problem with which you are all concerned. The juvenile becomes a delinquent when he is at war with society. The school can enable them to live at peace with one another.

# THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF DEATH

## THE CASE OF PAUL-LOUIS LANDSBERG: CHRISTIAN EXISTENTIALIST

ON the first of March 1933, four days before Hitler came into power, a young professor of philosophy, aged only thirty-two, got out of Germany. His name was Paul-Louis Landsberg, born in Bonn in 1901, the son of a professor of law, and he had himself become a professor at the age of twenty-five. From Germany he made his way to Spain, and the next year he was appointed professor of philosophy at Barcelona. He fell in love with Spain, but in 1936 the Civil War caught him at Santander. Again he got out, and this time he came to France. There he soon became associated with the "personnaliste" movement, founded by Emmanuel Mounier and grouped round the periodical *Esprit*. At the occupation of France he was again in flight, sought after by the Germans. He got away into the "free zone" of France; but he was finally arrested by the Gestapo at Pau in March 1943, and taken to the Camp of Orienburg, near Berlin, where he died of exhaustion a year later, in April 1944.

Landsberg was already making his name as a remarkable young philosopher. A friend of Max Scheler, he contributed to *Esprit*, *Dieu Vivant*, and other periodicals, and had also written books in German.<sup>1</sup> In 1937 he was invited by Brunschvicg to give a course at the Sorbonne on the philosophy of existence; and M. Claude Mauriac, in an interesting article on him in *Table Ronde*<sup>2</sup> remembers him at a philosophical conference on the subject of "destiny" at

<sup>1</sup> *Wesen und Bedeutung der platonischen Akademie* (Bonn, 1923); and *Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie* (Frankfort, 1934).

<sup>2</sup> *La Table Ronde*, July 1951, No. 43.

Pontigny in August 1939, and already then noted in his diary his remarkable "measured intelligence"; he also noted that two of the members of the conference, Landsberg and Jankelévitch, were juggling with the philosophical problems but not "throwing the ball so high", and juggling better—they were at the heart of the problem, for though they were playing too, "they were playing for their lives". And the next day he jotted down in his diary the one sentence: "Landsberg: a great Angel with invisible wings". An essay of Landsberg on "The Experience of Death" was published before the War, and was completely sold out. It is this essay that has now been republished, together with an essay on "The Moral problem of Suicide", edited with a biographical introduction by his friend Jean Lacroix.<sup>3</sup> Landsberg was of the "Christian existentialist" school, and says in this first essay that the nihilism of Heidegger's existentialism, with its "deadly seductiveness", must be countered by one which takes account of the three virtues of faith, hope and love—"A philosophy of existence which denies the ontological foundation of the three virtues of man, is a philosophy against existence." But for a long time Landsberg's adherence to the Christian faith was qualified. For although he claimed to be a Catholic, he told M. Lacroix that he could not agree with the Church on two points: her excessive legalism, as he considered it, in family and marriage questions; and her absolute condemnation of suicide, to which he could not subscribe. Ever since 1930 he had carried poison on him, and had made up his mind to use it in case of arrest by the Gestapo. However, just before his arrest at Pau in 1943 he had written to Lacroix that "I have now met Christ—He has revealed Himself to me". And it seems that his view was thereby modified. At any rate what is certain is that he destroyed the poison he carried on

<sup>3</sup> *Essai sur L'Expérience de la Mort, suivi du Problème moral du Suicide* (Ed. du Seuil, 1951). Messrs. Rockliff Ltd. are hoping to publish an English translation of these two essays in the near future.

him, and when he was arrested he accepted the commitment not to dispose of his life.

This personal history lends a terrible and moving actuality to the two essays that have now appeared, which are the theoretical discussion of the two problems he himself lived: the problems of the meaning of death and the legitimacy of self-slaughter.

## II

### *"The experience of death"*

Landsberg starts this essay from Voltaire's phrase, in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*<sup>4</sup>, that "the human species is the only one that knows it must die, and it only knows that through its experience of it". This, says Landsberg, is a typical piece of eighteenth-century empiricism, and an over-sanguine confidence in the reach of induction. Voltaire had a quantitative view of experience—he claimed that "a child brought up alone and transported to a desert island would no more suspect this necessity (sc. of death) than a plant or a cat would". Nevertheless there may be another sense of the word in which the "experience" of death does indeed bring us straight up against the necessity of our fate.

It is not enough to say, with Max Scheler, that the experience of death is the limiting point of the experience of growing old: for our "experience of death" comes too early in life for that to be its origin. No, it is in "the death of the other" that we first see death for what it is.

In primitive tribal experience death is unimportant, because a man's function in the clan is what matters about him, and when he dies this function is inherited without interruption—so "the clan has regenerated its lost member. It is as if nothing had happened". Thus "the consciousness of death goes along with human individualization, with the constitution of singular individualities, the work

<sup>4</sup> Vol. iv, p. 62.

of the person". Death now takes on a frightening aspect—the fear of annihilation. Primitive man fears "the dead" more than he fears "death". But more developed cultures may take one of two directions: that of Buddhism, which promises deliverance from birth as well as death—in fact, promises a final death; and that of Christianity which is "the supreme affirmation of victorious life".

The connection between death and individualization is seen in the important experience of the death of my neighbour or my beloved. "*The death of my neighbour* is infinitely more than the death of 'another'—any old other." First we stand by the bed and sympathize with the other's bodily pains. So when he dies there is a moment in which we are relieved. But then we begin to realize the absence of the one we loved. Death now becomes a "present absence". Here before me is that with which I cannot have communion—a corpse. So far we have not realized the "necessity of death". But now that too comes.

The consciousness of the necessity of death only awakens in us through *participation*, through the personal love in which this whole experience is bathed. We have constituted a "we" with the dying person. And it is in this "we", it is by the very power that is proper to this new being of a personal order, that we are led to the living knowledge of our own "I must die". For a moment we reach the frontier of the country of death. Immediately after we return from the kingdom of shadows. But has not the great chill of it touched us in that moment? Can we still remain the same after having felt it?

Notice that death is unreal to the soldier, because the personalizing conditions are absent—"death is a civilian conception". And when relatives at home receive the curt official notice of their son's death, do they not immediately try to discover all the details of it so that they can enter into a living compassion with the dead, replacing, indeed, "the dead man" by "the dying"? The death of my neighbour belongs essentially to my personal existence, and not to the realm of *on* ("one"—*das man*): and here



Heidegger goes wrong because he has a purely formal conception of the *mitsein* ("being with", community), and so lacks any conception of love. What above all we need is not only communion with the dead, but the sense of being able to do something *for* them.

But when death is seen thus, what is its "ontological foundation", its foundation in *being*? For in primitive experience man's death is merely like the beast's? The result of personalization is that death must now be "accepted" and thus "transformed". The proper essence of the human person is not "existence towards death" (as Heidegger again says): his essence is towards the realization of himself and towards eternity. This is why there is the "anguish of death"—not merely the pain of dying. This anguish

"would be incomprehensible if the fundamental structure of our being did not contain the existential postulate of a 'beyond', for then death would merely be a fact of the future—no doubt a painful one, but without any exceptional weight and without any threat of a metaphysical order. This very anguish shows us that death and *le néant* (nothingness) are opposed to the deepest and most indefeasible tendency of our being."

For hope is more than a mere sentiment in man. At the basis of man there is affirmation of himself; and hope is the very meaning of our life which prolongs the affirmation contained in the inner structure of all being. We must distinguish *l'espérance* ("hope" or "hopefulness") from *l'espoir* ("hope for this or that", sanguine expectation). The future of *l'espoir* lies in this world, in which one hopes for this or that. The future of *l'espérance* is the future of my very person in which I must fulfil myself. *L'espoir* anticipates my imagination; *l'espérance* creates by actualization. As trees produce fruit each spring, by an impulse analogous to hope, so man cannot live without *espérance*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Landsberg quotes the Spanish philosopher Unamuno, in his life of Don Quixote. M. Gabriel Marcel has discussed the same problem in several of his works, and reached similar conclusions.

Landsberg then analyses St. Augustine's *Confessions* (Book IV) to show how through the death of his friend, and the desolation into which it threw him, he first came up against the difference between spatial distance, which is relative, and the final absence felt in the death of another; and from this, the need to understand himself. "I became," said St. Augustine, "a great question to myself." And Landsberg comments that here "we are in at the birth of existential philosophy". There follows a clear and extremely competent account of various attitudes to death from Socrates onwards. ("The real basis of the *Phaedo*, certainly more convincing than the logical demonstrations of immortality which it contains, is the life, the hope, and the manner of death of Socrates.") The weakness of Platonism is that the "Ideas" in which it takes refuge are only thing-abstractions. "The world of which ancient philosophy gives us an account is not a *world of the neighbour*, a world constituted by 'caritas': it is above all a world of things, *things seen*, and even men there remain things like that, public and limited beings." Compared with the Epicureans, whose attitude to death is almost frivolous, the Stoics mark a great advance—for they, in their challenge to death and acceptance of suicide, express a courage born of hope. But even in them hope does not *conquer* death.

In a graphic chapter called "Tauromachic Interlude" Landsberg then describes a bull-fight, and with brilliant empathy gives us the bull's experience. At a certain moment the bull knows he must die, though he battles on. Man pretends to be the matador and to dispense life and death. But it is only an evasion: for it is really man who is the bull, who rushes out full of *élan* into the arena of youth, but gradually is hemmed in by the great matador, death.

Finally in a last chapter Landsberg discusses the significance for our problem of Christian mysticism. He does so with diffidence, for he says he has no personal experience of it and can but describe such examples as stand "at the

limiting point of the comprehensible to us who are not mystics". He takes St. Augustine again and St. Theresa of Avila, and shows them anticipating the life beyond death at moments of mystical experience. St. Theresa's desire for death has, he says,

"nothing sickly about it, it infinitely surpasses the stoic calm and the platonic 'ascension'. In truth, man can not love death for death's sake. He can not love death unless it is transformed into a state which is not death. True love of death can only be a form of the love of God."

### III

#### *"The Moral Problem of Suicide"*

In this second essay Landsberg narrows the discussion down to a particular point: but the previous analysis of the meaning and nature of death lies behind it.

He starts from the fact that Christianity is the only moral system in which suicide is *absolutely* condemned. The Epicureans look at suicide very calmly: to them it is merely walking out of the theatre when the play gets boring; and they add that in any case death does not touch us—as long as we live, death does not reach us; the moment we die there is no "us" for death to touch. But the Stoics go further: they even glorify suicide—better take one's life than lose one's honour or one's chastity (cf. Lucrece). Was, then, the early Christian thirst for martyrdom a form of the same glorification of suicide? Some have said so.<sup>6</sup> But, replies Landsberg, there is a profound difference between refusing to flee death and giving oneself to death.

The specifically Christian view of suicide is first fully stated by St. Augustine. He argued that Christianity is not a "slave morality" responsible for the sack of Rome; and

<sup>6</sup> He quotes a M. Bayet, who wrote a book on suicide, in which this identification is made. It will be remembered that Mr. Eliot's knights in *Murder in the Cathedral* conclude that St. Thomas of Canterbury committed suicide "while of unsound mind".

in particular that the Christian virgins ravished by the Goths refused to commit suicide, not out of cowardice, but because suicide is forbidden—they had not lost their honour, because they had not consented to their violation. Suicide is wrong simply because of the Mosaic law forbidding manslaughter. This argument, says Landsberg, is weak: it would condemn capital punishment or any form of lethal action, e.g. in war.

St. Thomas, however, gives different reasons for the “canon against self-slaughter”. They may be reduced to three.

(1) Suicide is *contra naturam*: against man’s natural inclination and against the law of charity which man owes to himself. But, says Landsberg, this would surely imply that suicide is very rare, which is not the case. And often suicide is not “against self-love” but even prompted by too great a love for oneself. And sometimes it arises, not from despair, but from a romantic leap into the beyond (cf. the suicide-pacts of lovers) and expresses a hope, no doubt wayward, in the unknown region beyond death.

(2) Aristotle (and Plato before him) had argued that man belongs to his city and his society, and has no right to contract out by suicide. And St. Thomas repeats this argument. But, says Landsberg, this argument, though sometimes valid, can not be generalized: what of the man who sees no possible further social use for his existence? Similarly Kant’s attempt to show the impossibility of universalizing a maxim of suicide ignores the personal nature of the problem. I must die sooner or later: how can my decision to die sooner become a universal law? Again, suicide is often considered “an act which expresses a decadent and individualistic anarchism. It has been forgotten that suicide can be found among the most healthy and war-like people, as a social duty in certain circumstances.”

(3) St. Thomas’ most serious argument is that we are God’s property, as the slave is his master’s property: man is not *sui juris*. It is for God to decide our life and death. But,

says Landsberg, the slave-analogy is embarrassing: the Stoics would reply—"precisely: but the free man can decide what to do with his life". But given a right conception of God, not as a slave-owner and tyrant, this argument may be valid.

Now, says Landsberg, imagine a man in tragic circumstances terribly tempted to suicide.

If you tell him that he must live in order to obey the commandment, in order not to sin against self-love, in order to perform his duty to society and his family, and finally in order not to decide, by his own will, a question which God must decide, I ask you: is that going to convince our man in his suffering and misery?

He may be held back by technical inefficiency, by fear, by some instinct or other for life, or, and this often happens "by implicit faith in the divine condemnation of it, or finally by the fear of Hell". But the traditional arguments will probably be powerless. What he needs, in any case, is not an abstract argument but an example. And here we have it indeed: that of Christ. We can remind him of Christ's sufferings, and say to him "You must not kill yourself, because you must not throw away your cross. You need it." The true acceptance of suffering is to love it only inasmuch as it contains a remedy willed by God. The moment of death has an importance for the Christian which it cannot have for (e.g.) the Buddhist (who, of course has not the same conception of sin), in that it is a moment of metaphysical decision. Strictly the suicide cannot be buried in consecrated ground: and if in practice the Church is now more indulgent it is not from abandonment of principle, but because we are to-day "more scrupulous about judging the mental state of the suicide, and about claiming that the act of repentance, which may be a sort of lightning flash of conscience in a moment of almost no duration, did not finally intervene". Finally suicide can often be seen, psychologically, as infantilism—a regression to the womb of the mother, death. The Stoic attitude is perhaps the highest in the world outside Christianity, but



the Christian saints knew an even higher form of heroism.

So far the arguments *pro* and *con* seem to be somewhat indecisive, with perhaps a slight tilt in the Christian direction of *con*. But as we now know, this essay remains in the realm of the theoretic. After it was written, Landsberg passed into the realm of actuality—the actuality of Christ as well as the actuality of death. There is a passage in the essay which perhaps hints at what might be demanded.

To-day, while Christianity has often become terribly mediocre, it finds itself at the same time menaced by a new paganism, fanatical and sometimes heroic in its own way. Either Christianity will disappear, or it will rediscover its original quality. It is not superfluous to-day to show . . . that Christian morality is not some sort of universal, natural or reasonable morality, perhaps with one sensation added on, but the manifestation in life of a paradoxical revelation. . . Christian morality is not a morality of compromise and cowardice, but it demands of us a deeper, in a sense a more absurd, a more intransigent morality than any other. There are some things which were taken for granted in a period still close to the martyrs : to-day we have to take explicit notice of them.

M. Claude Mauriac remembers him at the philosophical congress in 1939 as a “great big boy, brown, almost black, next to his fair young wife”.<sup>7</sup> But the vivid memory we carry away is that given us by a M. André Ribard, who was with him in the Concentration Camp and witnessed the final test of Landsberg’s teaching, the test which brings together Landsberg the philosophical theorist and Landsberg the Christian practitioner.

I think (he says in his memoirs) of Paul Landsberg, whose identity I only learned later : this professor, so emaciated, overwhelmed by his sadness and the exhausting nervous tension of our life, had drawn me. Had we not the same anxiety about human behaviour ? All knowledge is belief, he said to me, and belief demands something beyond itself . . .<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Art. cit., p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> *Introduction à la vie Publique*, p. 229. (Quoted by Jean Lacroix in Introduction, as above).

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